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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LAGOS 000013

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STATE FOR AF/W, INR/AA, DS/IP/AF, DS/ICI/PII, DS/DSS/OSAC
OSLO FOR HELENA SCHRADER
DOE FOR GPERSON, CAROLYN GAY
TREASURY FOR ASEVERENS, SRENENDER, DFIELDS
COMMERCE FOR KBURRESS
STATE PASS USTR FOR ASST USTR FLISER
STATE PASS TRANSPORTATION FOR MARAD
STATE PASS OPIC FOR ZHAN AND MSTUCKART
STATE PASS TDA FOR NCABOT
STATE PASS EXIM FOR JRICHTER
STATE PASS USAID FOR GWEYNAND AND SLAWAETZ

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/11/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGER DELTA MILITANTS REJECT CEASEFIRE

REF: ABUJA 23

Classified By: Consul General Donna Blair for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: The fragile peace agreement between the Federal Government and Niger Delta militants began unraveling in December 2007 and it now appears violence will escalate in early 2008. Criminals (Ateke Tom), militants (the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta and Tom Polo), and government (General Azazi) have all warned that they are prepared to use greater force to achieve their aims. These announcements follow criminal and militant disillusionment with the ceasefire, largely due to the use of military force in the region (reftel) during the ceasefire. End Summary.

Rivers: Ateke Tom & Governor Omehia Battle; Expect More

¶2. (U) Rivers-based criminal leader Ateke Tom, who purportedly leads the Niger Delta Vigilante Movement (NDVM) as well as the New Niger Delta Revolutionary Army (NNDRA), declared a showdown against Rivers Governor Amaechi in early January following a military Joint Task Force (JTF) attack on one of his camps. Tom said in a press release he would "fight Amaechi to a standstill," despite the fact that the JTF is controlled by the federal government, not the state. Tom claimed responsibility for reprisal attacks on two police stations and the Presidential Hotel in Port Harcourt on January 1. Approximately 14 casualties were reported after these attacks, which occurred the day government lifted the 2400 to 0600 hours curfew on the city.

¶3. (C) Patrick Naagbanton, a well-connected and reliable human rights contact, told Poloff one of Ateke Tom's commanders said Tom planned to continue his attacks. The commander commented Tom had been ready for peace but that Governor Rotimi Amaechi chose to "scatter it" (by attacking

Tom's base in Okirika--reftel) because he and Senator Sekibo had political differences. (Note: Senator George Sekibo politically favored former Governor Omehia and also publicly criticized Amaechi's recent threats to the Okrika community if they fail to handover Tom. End Note.) In order for peace to return to Rivers, Tom's commander told Naagbanton that the military should discontinue its attacks on Tom's camps and government should call for a truce. Naagbanton commented to Poloff that if Tom is pushed against a wall he will "wreak terrible havoc" as his troops are heavily armed.

¶4. (U) According to press reports, Chief of Defense Staff General O. Azazi ordered military formations in the Niger Delta to begin an offensive against known militants and their hideouts on January 9. Jomo Gbomo, the purported spokesman of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), said in a press release that MEND would support Ateke Tom with "fighters and heavy weapons" as fighting forces need to unite against the "undisciplined Nigerian army."

Delta: Polo Re-Arms After Leaving Peace Process;
Other Ijaw Push For Peace

¶5. (C) Militant leader Tom Polo from Delta State publicly renounced the Niger Delta Peace Process on December 25 after having observed the ceasefire for six months. Well-connected Sheriff Mulade, President of the Gbaramatu Youth Council (GYC), told Poloff on January 10 that militants are scared to return to negotiations for fear of being arrested, a fear caused by the JTF's attack on Ateke Tom despite his ceasefire with government. (Comment: Tom Polo's Camp 5 is located in

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the Gbaramatu Kingdom near Warri; Mulade claims to have direct contact with Polo and many youths due to his leadership role with the Ijaw GYC. Many Delta inhabitants claim Dokubo Asari's arrest in September 2005 occurred under the pretense of a ceasefire; their current concern is understandable. End Comment.)

¶6. (C) Polo has begun re-enforcing his camps in anticipation of a JTF attack and youths have been exchanging bunkered crude for advanced weapons (including ground to air capabilities) since they have no cash, Mulade alleged. He said government officials from the Presidency down to state commissioners are involved in bunkering and youths are used to escort boats out of the creeks. While Mulade claimed there are approximately 27 camps throughout the south-south, he estimated 95 percent of these are run by criminals, not individuals working for the Ijaw struggle.

¶7. (C) Many Ijaw want peace and Warri-based Ijaw groups have recently requested Delta State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission (DESOPADEC) Chairman Chief Okirika to try to convince Tom Polo to scale down his activities. (Note: Okirika and Polo have a good relationship as Polo believes Okirika has the power and will to develop the riverine areas. The creation of DESOPADEC in early-2007 and Okirika's appointment shortly thereafter may have factored into Polo's decision to join the ceasefire. End Note.) However, Mulade admitted some militants may not want peace because they are afraid of the unknown and fear becoming irrelevant.

Bayelsa Militants Back Out of GON Negotiations;
Hand Criminals to State Government

¶8. (C) Bayelsa state militants publicly renounced negotiations with the Federal Government due to its continued use of the JTF in the region but are purportedly maintaining positive relations with Bayelsa State Government, according to Dimeari Von Kemedi, Head of eGovernance and Due Process in

Bayelsa. Kemedi said the kidnapped father of the Deputy Governor of Bayelsa State was released on December 19, after 9 days in captivity. Kemedi intimated that militants in Bayelsa, not the police or JTF, arrested the criminals responsible for the attack. He said they turned over the Deputy Governor's father and the arrested individuals to the state government to show their goodwill towards government. Kemedi reported it was also discovered that a cabinet-level state official was involved in this kidnapping for ransom but he could not identify what action would be taken against this unnamed individual. (Note: Another father was kidnapped shortly after this release. End Note.)

¶9. (C) Jomo Gbomo claimed MEND did not support the militants' December 6 signing of the Bayelsa Peace Conference Agreement with the State Government. However, Kemedi told Poloff Jomo's announcement was not "inclusive" of most militants' opinions and that he was not concerned by this statement. While there have been numerous public statements issued by Jomo Gbomo over the past few months threatening attacks throughout the Delta, few have occurred since the ceasefire.

Comment

¶10. (C) The JTF attack on Ateke Tom clearly heightened tensions between criminals, militants and the military. Another military attack on Tom could result in substantial

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retaliations and possible collusion between Delta and Bayelsa based militants and Tom for self-preservation. Conversely, another criminal attack on the JTF could lead to even bolder military operations throughout the region. Numerous reports suggest militants are acquiring more advanced weapons in the region; if this is true, future attacks could prove more deadly and wide-spread than witnessed in 2006/2007. End Comment.

¶11. (U) This cable was cleared by Embassy Abuja.
BLAIR